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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001437

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [ASEC](#) [EG](#) [IS](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: GOI BRIEFING ON STATUS OF CROSSINGS

REF: A. A) TEL AVIV 1392

[B. B\) STATE 55424](#)

Classified By: DCM GENE A. CRETZ, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Brig. Gen. (res.) Baruch Spiegel on April 7 briefed the Ambassador, USSC Head General Dayton, and EU-BAM Head of Mission General Pistolese on the status of the crossings. Spiegel said that Sufa was working at full capacity and that there would be increased volume at Kerem Shalom once the scanners are operational. He said the fact there is a Hamas government is making it difficult to find a relevant, clear point of contact on crossing issues. Spiegel reiterated that the GOI continues officially to follow the bilateral understanding with the U.S. on illegal outposts. End summary.

STATUS OF CROSSINGS

[12.](#) (C) On April 7, Brig. Gen. (res.) Baruch Spiegel briefed the Ambassador, USSC Head General Keith Dayton, and EU-BAM head of Mission Lt. Gen. Pietro Pistolese on the status of the crossings. Spiegel said that Karni was open that day and, barring a dramatic change, would likely remain open until the eve of the Passover holiday. (Note: According to COGAT, Karni was closed April 9-10 and would be closed April 12-13 and April 18-19, the first two and last two days of the Passover holiday. End note.) Sufa, the main terminal for aggregates, has been working at full capacity, after reopening after nearly two months. Spiegel said that 15 Jordanian trucks carrying wheat donated by King Abdullah crossed into Gaza at Sufa on April 6. (Note: COGAT reports that 26 truckloads of basic foodstuffs belonging to the World Food Program entered Gaza at Sufa on April 9. The WFP currently has nearly 700 tons of wheat flour in Gaza. COGAT also offered UNRWA the use of the Sufa crossing on April 9 for the importation of its humanitarian supplies, but the organization declined, saying that it has sufficient supplies in Gaza for this week. End note.) Spiegel said 15-20 truckloads per day were entering Gaza at Kerem Shalom. He expected that the terminal would function more efficiently, allowing for increased volume, once the scanners are operational.

[13.](#) (C) Regarding security at the crossings, Spiegel said there is a 300 meter-long tunnel that was discovered 10 meters from the PA position near Kerem Shalom. He said the Palestinians had told the GOI that the tunnel is filled with water, but it still needs to be checked. He hoped the fiber optic cable near Kerem Shalom would be connected prior to the Passover holiday. Spiegel lamented the large number of Kassam rockets launched at Israel from Gaza and noted that more than 40 had been fired in the last week. Spiegel said that the IDF was using artillery fire (300 rounds/day), naval attacks, and helicopters to respond. He claimed that weapons were being brought in, mostly by tunnel, from Egypt. Although military cooperation with the Egyptians is good, Spiegel said, it is difficult to control smuggling through the Sinai. He said that without the safety belt of a sterile area, smuggling would be difficult to stop. He said the USAID water project had to stop due to the security situation, because it is impossible to continue digging and laying pipe in the current security climate. Spiegel said that a delay in the pipe project due to security threats could lead to serious water shortages in Gaza.

CUSTOMS AND SMUGGLING

[14.](#) (C) General Pistolese said that the solution to the smuggling of cigarettes, cosmetics, and other goods at Rafah is to open Kerem Shalom to commercial traffic from Egypt. He said that pedestrians bring in up to 20 bags of contraband and personal items⁸ because there is no open commercial terminal with Egypt. In addition, Pistolese said, it has been difficult for the customs people to handle all the extra bags brought in late in the day, especially on the last bus. When the contraband is seized, he said, the PA customs officials destroy it. Pistolese noted that there should be a presidential decree authorizing PA customs to sell seized items. If Kerem Shalom were open, he said, those with extra bags could be sent to Kerem Shalom where they would pay taxes on these items.

15. (C) Commenting on the U.S. proposal to send letters to both sides in order to avoid renegotiating or signing a customs agreement, Spiegel said this idea is a political issue and needs to be reviewed by the government (REF A). He said MFA Director General Ron Prosor has mentioned the idea to FM Livni, who will then discuss it with PM Olmert.

NEED FOR PA POC

16. (C) Spiegel said the fact there is a Hamas government is making it difficult to find a relevant, clear point of contact on crossing issues. He said that if the matter deals with operational functions, it can be handled on the ground. He said the Palestinians have started to change personnel in customs and at the crossings at Rafah. Spiegel said it is important to look at the situation carefully, because of the joint interaction in the past between PA customs and their GOI counterparts. He said that if there could be a POC on the PA side with which the GOI could have unrestricted contact, it would represent a breakthrough. USSC Head General Keith Dayton said that it is not clear that Hamas is putting in its own people with these personnel changes. He noted that Mahmud Abbas has said that he would create a separate customs authority out of the presidential guard, which would make it easier for contacts.

TUNNEL DETECTION SYSTEM

17. (C) The Ambassador mentioned the USAID security contractor would return to Israel on April 8 and would be able to provide a briefing on tunnel detection systems he looked at in the U.S. He said the U.S. is willing to work on financing of the project, starting at Karni crossing and then covering the entire border region. Spiegel said that if the technology works, it would be very helpful and increase security.

OUTPOSTS

18. (C) The Ambassador said that he had received guidance to reiterate the U.S.-Israel bilateral understanding on illegal outposts and to urge that no steps be taken in contravention of this understanding (REF B). Spiegel responded that this issue has been discussed many times with the U.S. side. He said that the GOI continues officially to follow this understanding. The new government will deal with this issue.

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JONES